



RESUMES 101

You know you need a strong resume, but how much professional detail should you include? Begin by remembering what a resume is really for: to “catch an eye” and get a phone call and interview from a prospective employer.

What we mean by this is that in today’s world of electronic media, large databases, impersonal connections, and strong competition for fewer jobs you, the job candidate, have to cleverly navigate through these obstacles to rise above the others if you hope to have any chance of being seen and heard. Producing a resume that successfully moves you through these perilous channels and elevates you to an interview requires a special effort, keen skills, and adaptability.

Your resume must tell an employer or recruiter a compelling story about you and your professional experience, knowledge, and skill set. More than ever, your resume is the key to successful employment and career advancement. Failing to craft one that achieves this is not an option.

Special Effort

What do we mean by “catch an eye?” Many employers today are routing employment inquiries and applications. They do so by using databases, software, and internal or external human resources staff or recruiters to screen candidates.

So more than ever, to “catch an eye,” your resume must include several all-important ingredients. Why? Because the person on the other end initially sorting through the database (generally a lower- or mid-level HR professional with little or no technical experience in your field) is using key words related to the job description in an attempt to find resumes that will pop up if they closely match the position to be filled. Think of this as the first cut. These then get forwarded on to more experienced professionals for further review.

To catch that eye you need to start with the basics. This includes your name, address, city, state, zip, phone number and e-mail address, and perhaps your LinkedIn URL. This may seem obvious, but it still surprises us today how many people (probably 10 percent) submit resumes that only include a name and no contact information or limited contact information. It’s no wonder their phone never rings. And while some might make a case for excluding your address because of Google Earth or other privacy issues, you are not going to get far in the process until the recruiter knows where you are geographically. In fact, some will disqualify you if you don’t have proper contact information. This is because they aren’t willing to go through the process of tracking you down or going through a much slower and longer contact effort if you aren’t easily reachable.

If you are thinking of limiting geographic information due to concerns about relocation related issues, just make a point to address relocation up front. If you are willing and able to relocate, state so in the resume and cover letter.

Key Words and Definable Skills

The second key ingredient is the use of key words. Dissect the job description, pulling out the key sentences that state the purpose of the position, the most important duties and responsibilities, and the required qualifications. Incorporate these into your resume, remaining as close to the actual verbiage as possible. This is because it’s common practice for HR analysts searching the resume database to type in those key phrases. In fact, some software systems will eliminate you if you don’t meet some key word criteria. So if you have included these into the main body of your resume you have a much greater chance of catching the eye of the human resource staff member or recruiter. This is the first important step for gaining an interview.

Now that you have caught the eye of the recruiter, your resume will be read to see how you match up to the opportunity. The more closely you state in your resume that you are a near perfect match to the position, the greater chance you will have getting that all-important initial interview phone call.

Adaptability

One of the more successful methods we have discovered in producing professional resumes for job candidates is using a “Professional Profile” section at the top of the resume. This is done for two purposes; first of course is to get those key words and phrases into the resume, but just as important, it allows for you to customize each resume to match the particular position you are seeking. For the most part, the main body of your resume, sections that include your work history, project list, professional affiliations and certifications, and education, will not change. So using a Professional Profile section in lieu of the common “Objective” section will enable you to weave those important phrases into your resume.

For example, a job description might read like this (*oversimplified for this purpose*):

Planner

National engineering and land development firm is seeking a planner to develop long- and short-term plans for land use related to growth and revitalization of urban, suburban, and rural communities.

Duties: Meet with clients and civic planning authorities to identify land-use options, and develop land-use plans that will meet the requirements for growth and revitalization of urban, suburban, and rural communities.

Responsibilities: Ensure all proposed plans meet federal, state, and local environmental regulations, zoning and building codes, and any other pertinent requirements.

Qualification Requirements: A bachelor's degree in urban, environmental, or related planning field, plus two years' experience producing long- and short-term land-use plans, and working directly with local elected and appointed planning officials and other key stakeholders.

Therefore, you might have a Professional Profile that reads like this:

Accomplished three-year career as a professional planner experienced working with engineering and land development firms producing long- and short-term plans for land use related to growth and revitalization of urban, suburban, and rural communities.

Adept meeting with clients and civic planning authorities to successfully identify land-use options and to develop land-use plans that meet the requirements for growth and revitalization of urban, suburban, and rural communities.

Have successfully ensured that all proposed plans meet federal, state and local environmental regulations, zoning and building codes, and any other pertinent requirements.

Possess degree in Urban Planning; proficient in MS Office Suite; able and willing to relocate immediately.

Again, using the key words and phrases of the job description in this fashion provides a higher probability that your resume will pop up, catch the eye of the recruiter, and get an initial inquiry phone call or interview. Plus, you can easily and quickly customize your resume to each position you are seeking.

Other key ingredients in a powerful resume include a chronological order of your employment history (starting with most current), including the name of the employing organization, city and state where located, years of employment, and your job title.

Don't simply state your job duties and responsibilities; this doesn't explain what you did or accomplished. In the course of performing your duties and responsibilities associated with the position, clearly explain what you did and what the outcome was. For every task we complete we have accomplished an objective. Tell us what you did, what this accomplished or achieved, or what its contribution was to a larger, greater achievement. No matter how small the task, it probably accomplished something that was important to the final outcome.

For example, say you wrote one section of a large, comprehensive General Plan. You might explain it as, "Researched, analyzed, and wrote key section of the city's general plan, contributing to its successful adoption by planning authorities and resulting in the development of the community's first living document."

In describing your employment history, make generous use of action verbs and adjectives. These are powerful words that add punch to your sentence and better attract the attention of the recruiter.

Tell a Story

Every one of us has a story. Just as your resume conveys information, it must also tell a story—a compelling one at that. In summary, to

produce a successful, powerful resume that tells your story compellingly, you should:

- Provide all of your contact information clearly at the top of the resume, including name, address, city, state and zip, e-mail address, phone number, and link to your LinkedIn profile.
- Use key words and phrases from the job description. Demonstrate that you are experienced and able to do the job, or capable (even if you have not yet gained that experience). We might not all be able, but we all are capable. "Capable" is a good word choice when you are searching for a term to explain that while you lack experience, you can learn to do the task.
- List any special skill sets, knowledge and expertise, along with professional certifications, special courses, or continuing education. Include professional affiliations and any publications and speaking engagements.
- List your employment history in a simple chronological order, including the name of the employing organization, city and state where located, years of employment, your job title, and most important, explain clearly and succinctly what you did and what you accomplished. Use action verbs and adjectives to accentuate your efforts.
- If you follow these guidelines, you stand a greater chance of success of "catching an eye" and getting that all-important initial phone call and interview.

Frank DeSafey is president/principal of Sequence Staffing in Roseville, California. Sequence is an executive search and recruitment firm committed to providing recruiting and personal branding solutions to the planning, environmental, GHG/climate change, sustainable energy, engineering, and construction industries throughout the United States and around the world. Craig Travis is the firm's vice president of recruiting, personal branding, and candidate marketing.